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Under the Umbrella of U.S. Hegemony: Canada and Colombia head towards a Trade Deal

Sheila Katz
International Department
skatz@clc-ctc.ca

Teresa Healy
Social and Economic Policy
thealy@clc-ctc.ca

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Summary

In June 2007, the Canadian government began controversial negotiations with Colombia with the intention of concluding a free trade agreement. The Government of Canada must answer its critics. How is it in Canada's interest, or the interests of the working people of Canada and Colombia to conclude such an agreement now? Who really benefits from such a deal? What harm will be done? As the two governments prepare to announce their agreement, it becomes clear that the answer to these questions lies in the nexus of U.S. economic/security interests and foreign policy in the Americas. To understand why Canada is about to announce this deal, we must actually focus more on Canada's relationship with the United States, than on its new bilateral interests in Colombia.

The Canadian labour movement and its allies continue to demand that Canada immediately cease negotiations and undertake a serious assessment of the human rights implications of such a deal.

It is important to understand that the United States does not perceive its interactions with Latin American countries as simply "inter-state" relations. Rather, the United States maintains extra-territorial control over countries in the region. It considers its own security to be dependent upon widening the space it controls around its own official territorial boundaries. Some of the ways in which the Bush Administration "extends its security perimeter" were explained in a report prepared for the U.S. Congress in early 2005. The Congressional Research Report analyses U.S. security policies which "push out the border". These are policies intended to ensure U.S. security by dealing with

issues before reaching their territory. These are policies that Canadians have become familiar with in the three years since Canada joined the United States and Mexico in the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP).

Since the defeat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the United States has chosen its South American negotiating partners carefully. It concluded a Trade Promotion Agreement with Peru in February 2006, and with Colombia in May 2006. It is in a highly 'securitized' context that the U.S. Administration's agreement with Colombia must be understood. In this post 9/11 era it is becoming increasingly apparent that the U.S. wars on terror, drugs and immigrants are implicated in extra-territorial initiatives which are justified as efforts to 'secure the border'.

The Administration does not hide the fact that the deal with Colombia is meant to extend the U.S. security perimeter by undermining Venezuelan leadership on economic and political alternatives. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has been promoting an *Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA); a "fair trade" initiative first established with Cuba (doctors for oil), then Bolivia, and then Nicaragua (under Daniel Ortega). Dominica is the first English-speaking CARICOM member to join. Most recently, Chavez has announced the creation of regional lending banks which provide alternatives to the International Monetary Fund.

As of early 2008, the U.S. deal with Colombia has not yet been ratified in the United States and this is a problem for the Administration in an election year. As the U.S. Congress began indicating to the Bush Administration that it would lose a vote on the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement if it were submitted to the House, the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper turned his attention to free trade with Colombia. Trade Minister David Emerson announced Canada would have a new focus on trade in the region with

countries that are compatible "in terms of our fundamental values and our approach to democracy" (Berthiaume, May 2007). It is unclear how Colombia meets this criteria under present circumstances.

Last December, at a press conference, Bush said that he would:

> like to quote Prime Minister Stephen Harper. He said the biggest fear in South America is not the leader in Venezuela, but the biggest fear for stability is if the United States Congress rejects the free trade agreement with Colombia (Harper, 2007).

If Canada were to pass a free trade agreement with Colombia at this point, it could seriously weaken Democratic opposition to the deal. Yet, that is exactly what Prime Minister Harper seems to be aiming for and what Bush is counting on.

In July 2007, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia* (CUT) issued a joint letter in which we demanded that "any trade and investment agreement between our countries should be *preceded* by labour and environmental assessments which would evaluate the likely economic and social impacts the deal would have." Together we argued that:

> no commercial agreements should be undertaken between Canada and Colombia before the Colombian government completely severs all ties with paramilitary organizations and international criminal networks, makes significant advances in the investigation and prosecution of crimes against trade unionists, provides meaningful and adequate protection for unions and trade unionists, brings its labour laws into conformity with ILO core standards and provides

full support for the newly created ILO office in Colombia to monitor labour rights compliance and pursue the investigation of key cases of assassinations of trade unionist (CLC-CUT, July 2007).

Now, fourteen years after the NAFTA came into effect, the Canadian Labour Congress, together with the rest of the labour movements in the hemisphere, still stands in opposition to these deals. Since Canada joined the United States and Mexico in the Security and Prosperity Partnership in 2005, we have watched Canada give up all pretense of an independent foreign policy. Increasingly, Canada follows the U.S. strategy of undermining Latin American solidarity by striking bilateral deals with countries identified by the Bush Administration as strategic. Moreover, in this generation of negotiations, "trade" and "investment" deals now also include a "security" aspect. In the current round of negotiations, the security of workers does not register as important.

Together with workers throughout the hemisphere, we are engaged in a collective struggle for economic equality, participatory democracy, human security and the defence of human rights. Yet this kind of cross-border solidarity is ignored; falling somewhere outside the definition of Canada's national interests in Latin America. Meanwhile, our political leaders play "good cop" for the U.S. in the hemisphere. It's long past time to ask the obvious question: What *is* Canada's national interest in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, CARICOM, Central America or Peru? Does it differ from that of the Bush Administration in *any* way at all?

Under the umbrella of U.S. Hegemony: Canada and Colombia head towards a Deal

There's not a country in the world where the list of martyrs is as long as it is in Colombia.
– Carlos Gutierrez, *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia* (CUT)

In June 2007, the Canadian government began controversial negotiations with Colombia with the intention of concluding a free trade agreement. Since this decision was announced, labour movements, together with human rights organizations, opposition political parties and solidarity groups in Canada, Colombia and elsewhere in the Americas have responded in anger and dismay. By all reports, the agreement is about to be signed, yet Canada has still to fully explain its case to the Canadian, or the Colombian people. The Government of Canada must answer its critics. Why is Canada pursuing a preferential trade agreement with a country where to be a trade unionist is to live under the constant threat of a violent death?

In the past 20 years, 2534 trade unionists have been assassinated. Since the present government came to power, 400 Colombian trade unionists have been murdered. At the moment, the current government is engulfed in a crisis of legitimacy as ever increasing numbers of government officials and political allies of the Colombian President come under investigation by the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice and the Office of the Attorney-General. The *parapolitical* scandal, so named because of government officials' close links to *paramilitary* groups, has now engulfed 46 members of Congress who were elected in 2006. To this point, 125 highly-placed political leaders have been linked to paramilitary death squads. Nearly all are either President Uribe's supporters or members of his political Party, *La U*. The chief of the secret police who reported directly to the President, is now in jail. He was in possession of computerized lists of trade unionists which he is alleged to have passed to paramilitaries and

death-squads. The President is now in the process of mounting a campaign against the Supreme Court. President Uribe's attempt to discredit the judicial system has recently been brought to international attention because of the opposition party's efforts (Polo Democrático Alternativo, 2008).

As it has become clear that Canada is about to sign a trade agreement with the Colombian government, the Canadian labour movement and its allies continue to demand that Canada immediately cease negotiations and undertake a serious assessment of the human rights implications of such a deal. As Canadian Labour Congress' Ken Georgetti said recently in a letter to David Emerson, Minister of International Trade:

> Corporate transnational business interests have been major beneficiaries of the violence and terror against labour and social movements in Colombia. Under these circumstances, a deal would further promote terror and violence for profit rather than act as a deterrent on these, as Prime Minister Harper has suggested. By turning a blind eye to these crimes at this time, as they are being investigated through the justice system, the government of Canada will become nothing less than an accomplice to these crimes (Georgetti, December 2007).

How is it in Canada's interest, or the interests of the working people of Canada and Colombia to conclude such an agreement now? Who really benefits from such a deal? What harm will be done? As the two governments prepare to announce their agreement, it becomes clear that the answer to these questions lies in the nexus of U.S. economic/security interests and foreign policy in the Americas. To understand why Canada is about to announce this deal, we must actually focus more on Canada's relationship with the United States, than on its new bilateral interests in Colombia.

U.S. Foreign Policy in Latin America: Trade, Investment and Security

As shown by the defeat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations, dissatisfaction with U.S. trade and investment policy is widespread in the Americas. Apart from Cuba's long-standing opposition, the peoples of Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua and most recently Guatemala have elected governments that have shown varying degrees of independence from Washington. These are the countries of the so-called "pink tide" because of their progressive policies. In these cases, we see governments respond favourably to the alternatives proposed by labour movements and their social partners throughout the hemisphere. Support for national development policies, such as those proposed in *Labour's Platform for the Americas* (ORIT, 2005) is growing. In response, the Bush administration was forced to abandon a multilateral approach to hemispheric trade relations and is pursuing targeted bilateral negotiations with "friendly" governments, throwing its weight behind administrations more in line with Washington's policies. As Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez takes the lead on opposition to U.S. attempts to maintain hegemony in the Americas, there is, increasingly, an alternative path for development and cooperation among Latin American countries.

In response, the United States has opposed this new multilateral alternative with, among other things, strategic bilateral negotiations. In this context, "trade" negotiations have less to do with tariff reductions than state restructuring, and are intended to result in what perhaps more accurately could be named "investment" and "security" agreements. The US Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) very clearly argues that trade agreements in the Americas must be concluded to ensure the long term security interests of the United States. The TPA makes the explicit link between security and prosperity by arguing that the trade and investment deals must ensure unimpeded access of the United States

to natural resources from the region (Ruiz Caro, 2007). But the U.S. security agenda goes farther than this in Latin America.

It is important to understand that the United States does not perceive its interactions with Latin American countries as simply "inter-state" relations. Rather, the United States maintains extra-territorial control over countries in the region. It considers its own security to be dependent upon widening the space it controls around its own official territorial boundaries. The U.S. State Department argues that, in order "(t)o help extend the U.S. security perimeter beyond our immediate borders, the Department helps selected other countries strengthen their own borders and gateways against drug and people traffickers, terrorists and other criminal groups, whether in Mexico, the Caribbean or countries neighboring on Afghanistan" (U.S. State Department, March 2003).

Some of the ways in which the Bush Administration "extends its security perimeter" were explained in a report prepared for the U.S. Congress in early 2005. The Congressional Research Report analyses U.S. security policies which "push out the border". These are policies intended to ensure U.S. security by dealing with issues before reaching their borders. These are policies that Canadians have become familiar with in the three years since Canada joined the United States and Mexico in the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). Such efforts include, immigration inspections at foreign ports for passengers seeking entry to the U.S.; advance submission of passenger manifests by air carriers en route to the U.S.; pre-screening individuals before they embark; computer-aided pre-screening involving the analysis of ticket purchasing behaviour and checks of names against terrorist watch lists; law enforcement on-board flights; no-fly lists; training of flight attendants; advance electronic cargo manifests; container security; partnership with industry to secure the supply chain of goods imported to the US; moving inspections away from the border through a North American Perimeter Security program; harmonization of U.S., Canadian and Mexican

immigration and refugee policies; interception of individuals considered national security threats; efforts to "eliminate the arrival of improperly documented aliens" (Congressional Research Service, March 2005).

The U.S.-Canada and the U.S.-Mexico relationships are the testing grounds for the new technologies through which the United States is extending its security perimeter through extra-territorial methods. We ought not to be surprised by this dynamic. When Canada entered into the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) in 1989, it was argued that we were protecting our "special relationship" with the United States. In effect, the CUFTA model became the NAFTA and the NAFTA-model has been imposed in subsequent U.S. *and Canadian* bilateral negotiations. Not only did Canada-U.S. trade and investment relations serve as the model for trade and investment liberalization, but now Canada is modeling the behaviour of a country with a 'most-favoured security perimeter'.

Apart from its concern that Canada and Mexico will continue to support policies which "push out" the U.S. border, the U.S. State Department refers to Caribbean nations as "the often overlooked U.S. 'third border'," and has run a "Third Border Initiative" since 2001 (US State Department, May 2007, p.681). The relationship between U.S. and Canadian foreign policy in the Caribbean deserves further analysis, especially in light of the recent U.S.-Dominican Republic deal, and Canada's recent negotiations with the D.R.

Since the defeat of the FTAA, the United States has chosen its South American negotiating partners carefully. In 2004, the U.S. and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) began negotiations on a trade and investment agreement, but the U.S. chose to negotiate only with countries participating in the *Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act* (ATPDEA). This *Act* lowered tariffs on imports to the United States for those Parties who would

commit to take land out of coca production. Venezuela was excluded. When Bolivia and Ecuador went ahead with their own alternative reforms guaranteeing more returns to the government from oil-revenues, the U.S. suspended negotiations with them. The United States then concluded a Trade Promotion Agreement with Peru in February 2006, and with Colombia in May 2006.

As a result, multilateral relationships have become more complicated in the Andean region and and in the Southern Cone. Venezuela left the CAN in protest over U.S. influence in the organisation (Ruiz Caro, 2007). Chile, under a pro- free-trade government, rejoined in June 2007 (Silkwood, 2007). Although Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez later applied to join *Mercosur*, the Southern cone trading bloc, he has also been promoting its own *Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA); a "fair trade" initiative first established with Cuba (doctors for oil), then Bolivia, and then Nicaragua (under Daniel Ortega). Dominica is the first English-speaking CARICOM member to join. Most recently, Chavez has announced the creation of an ALBA regional lending bank which will provide an alternative to the International Monetary Fund. This initiative builds upon the "Bank of the South" which was established last November by Venezuela along with Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay (James, 2008).

It is in this highly 'securitized' context that the U.S. Administration's agreement with Colombia must be understood. In this post 9/11 era, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the U.S. wars on terror, drugs and immigrants are implicated in extra-territorial initiatives which are justified as efforts to 'secure the border'. U.S. military spending in Latin America and the Caribbean surpasses economic aid. For example, the U.S. State Department has budgeted $590 million in aid to Colombia in fiscal year 2008, which is an increase from 2006 by $9.4 million (U.S. State Department, May 2007). However, independent sources suggest the U.S. spent $734 million in 2006,

83% of which was for military and police assistance [Center for International Policy (CIP), 2007]. Colombia is the third highest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel and Egypt and will actually receive $750 million in 2007-08. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs reports that this is far more than all of the other Latin American countries combined (Birns, 2007).

The Un-ratified Agreement between the U.S. and Colombia

The human rights implications of these recent U.S. "Trade Promotion Agreements" have been raised by the Administration's political opponents. Facing opposition at home and abroad, Bush tried to bolster support for his Latin American foreign policy in a six-day, five country trip in March 2007 to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The Administration remains unable to convince the Democratic House leaders of the validity of the Trade Promotion Agreement with Colombia:

> There is widespread concern in Congress about the level of violence in Colombia, the impunity, the lack of investigations and prosecutions, and the role of the paramilitary. Issues of this nature cannot solely be resolved through language in a trade agreement. We believe there must first be concrete evidence of sustained results on the ground in Colombia, and Members of Congress will continue working with all interested parties to help achieve this end before consideration of any FTA. Consequently, we cannot support the Colombia FTA at this time (House of Representatives, 2007).

The Administration does not hide the fact that the deal with Colombia is meant to extend the U.S. security perimeter by undermining Venezuelan leadership on economic and political alternatives. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gutierrez made it clear that the U.S. agreement with Colombia and its bilateral agenda in Latin America is intended to counter Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's power in

the hemisphere. Speaking to U.S. business leaders, he said, "A vote against these FTAs is a vote to slow vital reforms, helping those who wish to hamper the spread of free enterprise and democracy" (Koffler, 2007). As of early 2008, the U.S. deal with Colombia has not yet been ratified in the United States and this is a problem for the Administration in an election year.

The AFL-CIO strongly opposes the deal, pointing out that murders of Colombian trade unionists have been committed with impunity. In 97% of these cases, no one has been convicted of these crimes. Writing to Congress Representatives, President John Sweeney said that under current conditions:

> … we have little hope that workers, who are simply unable to exercise their basic rights in the existing hostile environment, would benefit from any potential expansion of trade or investment. Furthermore, passing the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement at this time would cost the United States considerable leverage over Colombia to encourage continued progress on human rights (Sweeney, 2007).

The Peru agreement was, however, ratified by the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2007 after enough Democrats were satisfied with bilateral amendments which gave increased protections for labour and the environment in Peru, as well as an extension on the NAFTA trade adjustment assistance program for US workers affected by layoffs (Ruiz Caro, 2007). Peruvian unions continue to oppose the deal even after these improvements were made (CUT-CGT Peru, 2007).

Now, as the Bush Administration begins its renewed campaign to have the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement ratified, it is unlikely to force an acrimonious debate in the House of Representatives. They would run the risk of losing important support from pro-free trade Democrats who would not like to embarrass their party during an election year. It would be unlikely that implementing legislation would be introduced by the Bush Administration without the consent of the Democratic House leadership (*Inside US Trade*, January 2008).

To obtain ratification, the Administration's tactics are more careful and have both a domestic and an international aspect. The Bush Administration has recently begun leading Congressional delegations to Colombia to convince Democrats of the merits of a free trade agreement. They are following the example of the business delegation which brought lobbyists from major U.S. companies and business associations to Colombia last fall (*Inside U.S. Trade*, January 2008).

At an advance briefing for journalists covering Secretary of State Condolezza Rice's delegation to Colombia in January 2008, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Thomas A. Shannon made the connection between this trade agreement and U.S. security interests. He argued it is imperative for the U.S. Congress to ratify the deal with Colombia in order to consolidate the U.S. presence on the Pacific:

> ... it's not just about our relationship with Colombia, even though that's very important. Colombia's a strategic partner of ours in a tough region and we have gained a lot through out relationship with Colombia. But if our Congress successfully approves the Colombian free trade agreement and the free trade agreement with Panama, it will create an unbroken string of free trade agreements along the

> Pacific coast of the Americas from Canada to Chile. This is a remarkable accomplishment. It is a string of free trade agreements that covers about two-thirds of the GDP of the region, not including the United States. It covers about one-third of our global trading. And it creates a strategic platform not only to jump across the Pacific to some of the most dynamic economies of the world, but also to have I think an interesting discussion with MERCOSUR and other countries in the region that have not yet reached a moment in which they're prepared to explore larger free trade talks with us. ..(T)his has a strategic component to it which is bigger than Colombia, it's bigger than us, it's about how we relate to the Americas. And it's how we begin to consolidate an understanding of democracy and an understanding of free trade that is certainly in our interest. ("Advance Briefing of the Secretary's Trip to Colombia", *M2 Presswire*, January 2008).

Similarly, on a recent trip to Colombia, Mike Mullen, the U.S. Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff elaborated the need for a U.S. presence on the Atlantic side. While accusing Chavez of supporting the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and expressing concern that Venezuela is buying arms, Mullen also indicated that the U.S. Navy is likely to re-establish the presence of its 4th Fleet in Florida which would allow it to sail in Atlantic waters stretching from the Caribbean through Central and South America (*Newstex*, January 2008).

Rice's delegation, which included four Sub-secretaries and nine Democratic Congressional Representatives, met with the leadership of Colombia's labour confederation, the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT). The CUT argued that the asymmetries between the two countries would mean, in effect, the annexation of the Colombian economy to that of the United States. As well they explained the negative impact which they

forsee for the agricultural sector, as well as for sovereignty in food production, industry and health care. They explained that the loss of markets for legal crops would increase the power of the narco-traffickers. As well, they discussed the violence against trade unionists and the impunity with which crimes are treated. Finally, they invited the U.S. government not to approve the agreement and to maintain pressure for the Colombian government to reform its legislation and put ILO standards into practice.

In response, the Secretary of State indicated that the Government of Colombia was an ally of the United States and, as a result, the U.S. government would continue to promote this free trade agreement which, in her view, has the most stringent requirements on labour issues of any agreement to date. The Congressional representatives spoke in favour of just trade and suggested that it would be very difficult for this agreement to pass in the United States given the widespread outrage over human rights violations (CUT, February 2008).

The Administration is having little success swaying Colombian popular opinion to their perspective, however. Immediately upon landing in Colombia on January 24th, Condoleezza Rice was declared *persona non grata* by the Colombian free trade coalition leadership and their members. The *Comité Colombia de Lucha Contra el ALCA*, and the *Red Colombiana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio* - Recalca, called for protests and popular mobilizations on the occasion of her visit to their country (RECALCA, January 2008).

Canada-Colombia Negotiations

> *Why Canada, Why?... What is at stake is Canada's reputation as a highly-minted symbol for public rectitude and the politicians' projections of a principled government known for its integrity (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, July 2007).*

As the U.S. Congress began indicating to the Bush Administration that it would lose a vote on the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement if it were submitted to the House, the government of Prime Minster Stephen Harper turned his attention to free trade with Colombia. In early June 2007, Canada announced it would begin negotiations to conclude a free trade agreement. Trade Minister David Emerson announced Canada would have a new focus on trade in the region with countries that are compatible "in terms of our fundamental values and our approach to democracy" (Berthiaume, May 2007). It is unclear how Colombia meets this criteria under present circumstances.

Last fall, Prime Minister Stephen Harper travelled to New York to deliver the following message to the Council on Foreign Relations. On September 25, 2007 Harper said:

> In my view, Colombia needs its democratic friends to lean forward and give them the chance at partnership and trade with North America. *I am very concerned that some in the United States seem unwilling to do that. What message does that send to those who want to share in freedom and prosperity?* There is a lot of worry in this country about the ideology of populism, nationalism and protectionism in the Americas and the governments that promote it. *But frankly, my friends, there is nowhere in the hemisphere that those forces can do more real damage than those forces in the United States itself. And if the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could ever hope to achieve* (emphasis added) (Prime Minister's Office, 2007).

Then on October 12th, in speech to Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, George W. Bush referred to Harper's speech:

> As Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada put it, if the United States turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve (White House, 2007).

Later at a December press conference, Bush once again said that he would:

> like to quote Prime Minister Stephen Harper. He said the biggest fear in South America is not the leader in Venezuela, but the biggest fear for stability is if the United States Congress rejects the free trade agreement with Colombia (Harper, 2007).

If Canada were to pass a free trade agreement with Colombia at this point, it could seriously weaken Democratic opposition to the deal. Yet, that is exactly what Prime Minister Harper seems to be aiming for and what Bush is counting on. The upshot of this sordid affair is that the Canadian Prime Minister has used his good offices to lobby the U.S. Congress on behalf of their own President and his unpopular trade policy.

As part of its international assistance to Colombia, Canada recently announced $1 million to develop an "International Program for Professional Labour Administration" which is meant to "facilitate dialogue between the Colombian government, business and labour" (Government of Canada, 2007). In a letter to the Canadian Labour Congress, the Minister for International Trade David Emerson argued that the Canadian government is negotiating labour and environmental cooperation agreements committing "all parties to respect key labour and environmental management principles" (Emerson, 2007). Here, he does not speak about human rights. Furthermore, every indication is that the Canadian government is about to announce that it has negotiated a trade, investment and security deal that is very close, if not identical to the U.S.-Colombia Agreement.

Unfortunately, the Harper government has not spoken to the labour unions in Colombia or Canada. In fact, it has refused to release draft documents to the labour movement, to ask advice, or to brief representatives of workers about what issues are in play. In July 2007, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia* (CUT) issued a joint letter in which we demanded that "any trade and investment agreement between our countries should be *preceded* by labour and environmental assessments which would evaluate the likely economic and social impacts the deal would have." Together we argued that:

> no commercial agreements should be undertaken between Canada and Colombia before the Colombian government completely severs all ties with paramilitary organizations and international criminal networks, makes significant advances in the investigation and prosecution of crimes against trade unionists, provides meaningful and adequate protection for unions and trade unionists, brings its labour laws into conformity with ILO core standards and provides full support for the newly created ILO office in Colombia to monitor labour rights compliance and pursue the investigation of key cases of assassinations of trade unionist (CLC-CUT, July 2007).

In October 2007, the Colombian Trade Union Federations prepared a report to guide the work of a high-level International Labour Organization mission. The labour federations asked the ILO to consider their evaluation of the Tripartite Agreement which had been signed between labour, employers and the government in 2006. The labour federations argued that:

> Fourteen months later, compliance with the agreement has been obstructed and there is no evidence of true will on the part of the

> government, or of the employers, to implement it or develop it. Only in January 2007 did a permanent presence of the ILO materialize, and nine months later no significant progress has been made with respect to this agreement; only a few measure that, given the gravity of the Colombian situation, do not represent substantial change (Columbian Trade Union Federations, October 2007).

In November 2007, the largest labour centrals in Colombia wrote to the U.S. Congress to elaborate the reasons for their rejection of the deal and to call on the US Congress not to ratify this agreement (Columbian Trade Union Federatons, November 2007).

In response to these concerns, Stephen Harper said he would not ask for human rights to be respected in advance of negotiations. In fact, he went further and retorted: “We're not going to say, 'Fix all your social and political and human rights problems and only then will we engage in trade relations'. That's ridiculous” (Perdomo, 2007).

In their analysis of the Canada-Colombia and Canada-Peru negotiations, the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade, argued that Canada is playing a dangerous game:

> Far from ensuring greater global security, continental economic policy and the FTAs promoted by the U.S., and that Canada seeks to copy, are the reason that Latin America and the Caribbean represent today one of the regions of the world that suffers from the greatest levels of poverty, inequality, violence and migration. On its present course, the Canadian government will have to bear the responsibility for deepening the underdevelopment in the region given that such a trade agreement will only benefit corporations

while relegating millions of citizens to a life of misery in violence-plagued shanty towns ringing Colombian and Peruvian cities (RMALC, 2008).

Conclusion:

Since the inception of the Canada-U.S. free trade negotiations in the late 1980s, the labour movement has challenged the Canadian government to choose national economic policies that increase equality and strengthen democracy, over policies that increase corporate power and weaken workers' voices in Parliament and society more generally. In the 1990s we opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) because it strengthened investors' rights while adding an ineffective mechanism for dealing with workers' concerns. Neither did the NAFTA provide any way of addressing asymmetries of wealth and power on the continent. This was an affront, we said, to the labour movement's commitment to solidarity across borders. We opposed the Free Trade Area of the Americas and joined instead with our partners in the Hemispheric Social Alliance, and developed our own proposals for economic cooperation in the Americas.

Now, fourteen years after the NAFTA came into effect, the Canadian Labour Congress, together with the rest of the labour movements in the hemisphere, still stands in opposition to these trade and investment deals. Since Canada joined the United States and Mexico in the Security and Prosperity Partnership in 2005, we have watched Canada give up all pretense of an independent foreign policy. Increasingly, Canada follows the U.S. strategy of undermining Latin American solidarity by striking bilateral deals with countries identified by the Bush Administration as strategic. Moreover, in this generation of negotiations, “trade” and “investment” deals now also include a “security” aspect. In the current round of negotiations, the security of workers does not register as important.

Given the fact that NAFTA-style labour side-agreements have been ineffective in protecting workers' rights, even the inclusion of a labour chapter in the text of the Canada-Colombia agreement would not prevent even a single death threat from being uttered. It is unlikely that a labour chapter would protect workers against NAFTA-like rights for investors and employers. As researchers at Colombia's National Union School argue:

> … the signing of a free trade agreement between Colombia and Canada would mean a political prize for the Colombian government, but it would not ensure the lives and the safety of Colombian trade unionists. Nor would it guarantee labour rights, union freedoms and social dialogue… (I)f the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper really wants to respect "Canadian values", which presumably include human and labour rights, he must not conclude a trade agreement with the present government of Colombia (Escuela Nacional Sindical, 2008).

Similarly, the Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers argues:

> …preferential trade agreements have not generally provided any real mechanism to ensure labour rights are protected when implemented by contracting parties. When combined with other aspects of the "free trade" agreements that affect workers lives, the effect is downward pressure on labour rights and employment standards accorded to workers. The ability of workers to protect their rights and livelihood has been seriously diminished by the advent of regional preferential trade agreements. (Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers, 2008).

Both the Canadian and the U.S. governments argue that free trade promotes economic growth, which in turn leads to democracy. Asserting a truth does not make it so, however, and there is no direct, historical link between liberal markets and democratic politics. Democratization is never a straightforward process and it depends upon the active engagement of civil society and labour movements to realize its goal. Since the debt crisis of the early 1980s, the United States has promoted neo-liberal policies which have subjected Latin American countries to the imperatives of the market, but these have not brought about sustainable development or any measure of economic equality. One could make the more obvious point that liberalized markets have already provoked economic inequality, social opposition, state repression, insecurity and authoritarian politics. It was the failed promise of the "Washington Consensus" itself that turned populations away from neo-liberalism and has caused the so-called "pink tide" countries to move towards autonomous policies and more democratic economic alternatives.

Together with workers throughout the hemisphere, we are engaged in a collective struggle for economic equality, participatory democracy, human security and the defence of human rights. Yet this kind of cross-border solidarity is ignored; falling somewhere outside the definition of Canada's national interests in Latin America. Meanwhile, our political leaders play "good cop" for the U.S. in the hemisphere. It's long past time to ask the obvious question: What *is* Canada's national interest in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, CARICOM, Central America or Peru? Does it differ from that of the Bush Administration in *any* way at all?

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